

ChalcedonReport

MINISTRY NEWS FROM THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION® AUGUST 2026

The Nature of the American System

Chalcedon leadership discuss the question of whether America can be made great again.

The phrase “Make America Great Again” has become one of the defining political slogans of our age. Whether one embraces it or opposes it, the slogan asks a legitimate question: What actually made America great in the first place?

Some will offer the Constitution or free markets while others might imagine an “age of innocence” in which the further one goes back—usually to their respective childhood—the better things were.

Others might mention that the ingenuity and industry of the American people created a prosperous nation, and a strong military protected our great freedoms, but are any of these the foundation of America’s greatness?

In the opening chapter of *The Nature of the American System*, R. J. Rushdoony argued that America’s greatness did not originate in its political structure but in its Christian foundation. The Constitution itself limited the powers of the newly created federal government, but that itself could only work if the citizens were people of faith, morality, and practiced self-government. Therefore, if those foundations be eroded, how can a country ever be great?

The Christian Ethic

During a recent Chalcedon Podcast discussion, Mark Rushdoony observed that many Americans have become deeply patriotic while remaining remarkably ignorant of the nation’s origins. Patriotism, he noted, has often been reduced to nationalism—a love for national strength detached from any understanding of the Christian principles

that once gave the nation its distinctive character. He explained,

“America was great because it had a very strong Christian ethic... But once that moral foundation was lost and the faith is no longer there, the moral ethic disappears very quickly. And then the structure that is left, the constitutional framework, means relatively little. The Constitution doesn’t work well when you have a people divorced from the faith that made it workable.”

His observation challenges the common assumption that governmental reform alone can restore a civilization. Constitutions may restrain power, but they cannot manufacture virtue. Laws may define justice, but they cannot produce the character necessary to preserve it.

The Forgotten Foundation

Modern discussions about America’s founding frequently celebrate the nation’s political achievements while ignoring the religious convictions that shaped them. As a result, we inherit a version of history that praises the fruit while severing it from its roots.

Chalcedon vice-president, Martin Selbrede, noted in this discussion that while many Americans sense the nation has declined, they misunderstand what made it strong in the first place:

“We are correct in saying there was an erosion from a great height. We fell from a great height, but what that height looked like, we have a wrong idea of it.”

Because the diagnosis is wrong, the proposed cures are wrong as well. Martin continued,

“The kind of ideas that are going to

be put forward for making America great again inevitably involve a continual and worsening violation of God’s law... the path to strengthen a nation as such is not the path that’s going to be proposed by a statist.”

Rushdoony devoted a great deal of his writing to America’s Christian founding, and although many conservative Christians will agree with him, they still reduce the argument to belief only. Rushdoony argued that it was the biblical worldview of the colonies that produced local responsibility, decentralized authority, and Christian self-government. These are what make a nation great, and once those foundations are abandoned, a nation will retain a shell of liberty while steadily losing its substance.

America’s “Second Revolution”

In *The Nature of the American System*, Rushdoony described America’s decline as a second revolution—not a violent overthrow like the French Revolution, but a gradual revolution in ideas.

Mark Rushdoony explained that the Puritanism of early America declined as Unitarianism grew, and with that, statist thinking:

“There was a move away from the limited government of the Constitution toward a form of nationalism... the state now was the primary agency, and the focus was on the nation rather than on the liberties.”

He then contrasted the modern understanding of freedom with that of America’s founders:

“The freedoms that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were looking at

were not the freedoms of a nation... They were the freedoms of the individuals, and you cannot have a free people unless you have freedoms for individuals.”

Once liberty is viewed as something granted by the state rather than protected from the state, constitutional restraints inevitably begin to weaken. Rights become privileges, personal responsibility gives way to dependence, and centralized authority steadily expands.

The Loss of Localism

Perhaps the strongest emphasis throughout the discussion was Rushdoony’s defense of localism.

Martin reminded listeners that the counties—not Washington—were the true center of political life in early America:

“The actual basic political unit in the colonies... were the counties. That’s where everything really mattered.”

Why was this so important? Because power was intentionally kept close to the people. As Martin explained, “By localizing power, it not only restricts it, but also makes it more responsible.”

Contrast that with today:

“When it’s way off there in Washington, D.C., and all power is centered and controlled over there... this is a method of subversion. It subverts the biblical position to centralize power when in fact it’s intended to be very decentralized.”

Rushdoony believed this decentralization reflected the biblical pattern of self-government. Families, churches, counties, and states each possess their own God-ordained responsibilities. Healthy societies grow from the ground up rather than being engineered from the top down.

Martin summarized the point memorably:

“You cannot have a solution from the top down... A revival must be from the ground up.”

The question then becomes whether such a revival can happen without not only a revival but a radical transformation in the worldview of Christians today. This is not simply a return to early America, nor can such

transformations develop politically. The real work is in Christian Reconstruction, which at this time involves primarily the education of Christians in self-government, dominion, and the creation of alternatives to the state.

When the State Becomes the Savior

As Christian self-government declines, something inevitably fills the vacuum, and Martin warned that America has increasingly transferred authority from individuals and families to the state:

“We have created a new false god.”

Rushdoony repeatedly argued that statism is more than an enlarged civil government. Modern statism is a substitute religion that promises salvation through political power.

One could argue that this is the reason for the Left’s emotional breakdown when they’re not in power. The reason being is that their morality can only be exercised by means of the coercive state—not by means of self-government—so their religion is defunct without complete political power.

The discussion illustrated this clearly through the subject of charity.

Martin explained how privately funded Christian charity gradually became state administered and eventually political:

“When charity becomes political, it is not about charity, it’s about power.”

He continued by explaining why the state resists independent Christian action:

“The state wanted to be the only source of government... They wanted people only to look to the state for help, and if you were an independent source of help, that made you an independent source of governance.”

That observation reaches far beyond welfare programs. It explains why the modern state continually seeks to absorb responsibilities once carried out by families, churches, charities, schools, and local communities. This is why a return to tithing and dominion is necessary. Christians must finance the work of reconstruction in every sphere of life.

Recovering Christian Self-Government

If statism is the ailment, Rushdoony believed the cure begins with Christian self-government. In reference to *The Nature of the American System*, Martin said, “The entire premise that Dr. Rushdoony brings out... is the importance of Christian self-government and how that is to be recovered.”

What is Christian self-government? It’s self-government in terms of God’s law-word, but this includes more than regulating one’s life in holiness. It means creating faithful families, strong churches, voluntary charity, and a commitment to Christian education. Beyond that, it involves health, business, apprenticeship, science, justice, the arts, and more.

In this sense, it’s really not about making America great again. Our mission is the Kingdom of God regardless of the nation, but a great opportunity exists here in these United States, and we should labor diligently to take full advantage of it.

Politics Isn’t Enough

For too many Christians, the emphasis is placed on politics, but politics alone cannot restore liberty. Without Christian character, constitutional restraints eventually become meaningless. Without biblical morality, freedom degenerates into license.

Something unique is certainly happening in American politics, and our prayer is that the church will recognize the opportunity to restore the spiritual capital of Christian character and learn more about the work of reconstruction. As you well know, this is the mission of the Chalcedon Foundation, but we are a small ministry. We’ll strive to be faithful to publishing and promoting the message of Christian Reconstruction, but more is needed. We see you as part of this ministry being faithful where God has placed you. May the Lord multiply our mutual efforts for His Kingdom. 🙏

You can listen to the entire podcast discussion on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/ChalcedonPodcastEp66>

Is God's Love Really Unconditional?

Mark Rushdoony on Today's Gospel Message

One of the more common statements in modern Christianity is, "God loves you unconditionally." It sounds comforting, reassuring, and compassionate. Yet while Scripture repeatedly affirms the love of God, it never presents His covenant relationship with man as being without conditions. In fact, from Genesis to Revelation, God consistently establishes the terms by which His people are to live before Him. Has it changed?

In a recent interview on the *Out of the Question Podcast*, Chalcedon president Mark Rushdoony addressed the growing tendency to separate the love of God from His law, arguing that this seemingly harmless idea has profound theological consequences.

"God places conditions on His relationship with man," Mark explained. "The Scripture is full of conditions, what God expects of man. So, to have any theology that suggests that there are no conditions to God's covenant salvation is way out of the ballpark. It's a foul ball."

Isn't it true that God's covenants have always involved both promises and obligations? Adam was given dominion over the Garden but forbidden to eat from one tree. Israel received God's blessings under the Mosaic covenant while also receiving His law. Even under the New Covenant, believers are called to faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance. Christ Himself declared, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Yet much of modern evangelicalism has reduced the Gospel to little more than obtaining an individual decision for Christ, and that's easy to do when the message is incentivized, as Mark observed:

"The whole idea of unconditional love is intended to appeal to man... It's all about your salvation. God is only trying to save you. So, it sounds much more appealing if there's no strings



Mark Rushdoony interviewed on the *Out of the Question Podcast*, hosted by Andrea Schwartz.

attached, no conditions, no obedience, and yet the Bible is full of obedience."

Such an approach inevitably changes how the Gospel is presented. Instead of proclaiming the holiness of God and the lordship of Christ, the emphasis becomes persuading people to "say yes to Jesus." Mark reflected on the emotional altar calls common in many churches during his youth and warned that they often relied more upon psychology than biblical discipleship.

"When you are preaching a gospel that is geared towards appealing to man... you gear your message not to what Scripture is saying, but you gear it toward persuading man."

This emphasis has another consequence. If salvation is viewed primarily as securing a future home in heaven, then the Kingdom of God and the believer's responsibility within it become secondary. The Kingdom is the greater purpose we're to serve, and that's predicated on an obedience that's not commonly taught.

"If we're citizens of the Kingdom of God... then we owe Him obedience." He continued, "They don't really have any vision of a kingdom... The gospel

of the Kingdom of God was the theme of Christ throughout His ministry. And if we don't know what the Kingdom of God is even about... then what in the world are we doing?"

This is why the issue cannot be dismissed as merely theological terminology. When Christians separate God's love from God's law, they also separate grace from obedience and faith from faithful living. The result is a church that often struggles to apply its faith beyond personal spirituality.

Throughout the interview, Mark repeatedly returned to the same point: God's standards do not originate outside of Himself. We do not judge God according to our ideas of fairness, tolerance, or love. Rather, we learn what righteousness, goodness, and truth are by looking to His character.

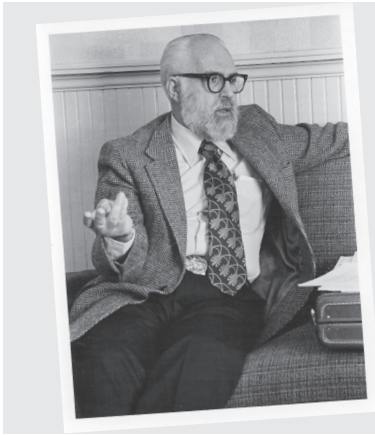
"God is wisdom... God is good... We understand righteousness, goodness, truth. We don't define these and hold God to them. We understand them from who God is."

The practical implication is straightforward. Christians are not called merely to profess faith but to live covenantally under Christ's lordship. Obedience is not the means of earning salvation, but it is the inevitable expression of belonging to God's Kingdom.

As Mark concluded, "We're citizens of the Kingdom of God, and therefore God expects us to obey the laws of the Kingdom and to serve the Kingdom... We can't be productive in the Kingdom of God if we're disobeying its law."

The Gospel is indeed good news—but it is the good news that sinners are reconciled to a holy God who lovingly calls His redeemed people to faithfulness, obedience, and productive service in His Kingdom. 📖

You can listen to the entire podcast discussion on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/OOTQEp391>



***"There is a king in our lives,
and His name is Jesus Christ.
To be under a king is to be
obedient to Him and to serve
Him. Who is the king in your
life?" ~ R. J. Rushdoony***

The King in Our Lives by R. J. Rushdoony

A Word In Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life, Volume 7, pp. 48-49

Paul in Romans 6:12 says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." If we read this verse in isolation from the preceding one, we fail to see its meaning. Romans 6:11 requires us to be dead to sin but "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Too often, people are negative in their profession of faith; they are against sin, which is merely common sense. Everyone is against other people's sins, while being indulgent of their own. Even criminal gangs are hostile to having any member cheat or rob them. However, we can be against our own sins and still be far from godly.

Our faith is not negative. It is not merely being against sin; it is the positive faith in and obedience

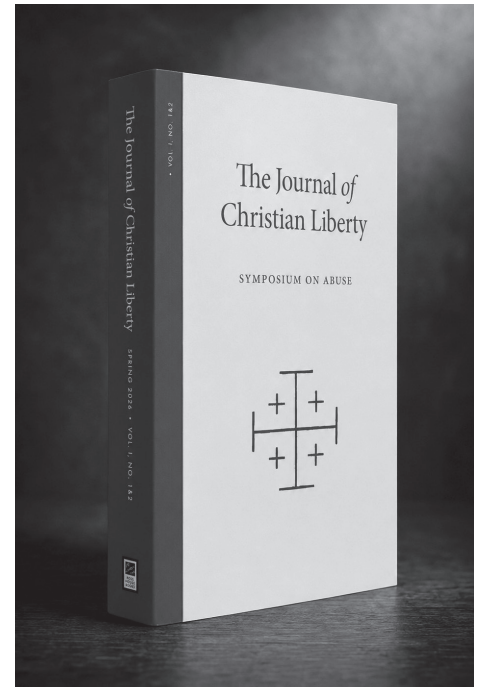
to Christ as our King or Lord. It is pharisaism and hypocrisy to see ourselves as good because we say yes to Jesus and see others as bad because they do not. Faith is more than a matter of words. It is life, a life lived in faithfulness and obedience to Christ as King. It means that Someone reigns or is king over us, even Jesus Christ, so that we live and move and have our being in obedience to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. To be redeemed by Christ means that we are His possession and property and we live in terms of His law. It means that there is a king in our lives, and His name is Jesus Christ. To be under a king is to be obedient to Him and to serve Him. Who is the king in your life? 📖

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NEW! The Journal of Christian Liberty from Chalcedon

The church is supposed to protect the weak—not protect abusers. Yet across modern Christianity, victims of clergy abuse are too often silenced, manipulated, and further harmed by the very institutions claiming to represent Christ.

The inaugural double edition of *The Journal of Christian Liberty* confronts this crisis head-on with biblical clarity and uncompromising honesty. Featuring multiple contributors, this landmark volume examines clergy abuse, institutional corruption, spiritual manipulation, and the tactics predators use against unsuspecting men, women, and children.

Included is the premier publication of Course Correction—a devastating case study exposing how Christian leaders protected a well-known evangelical missionary after admitted sexual harassment while abandoning the victim.

This is not sensationalism. It's a call for biblical justice, repentance, and reform.

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